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SOME CONTEMPORARY AMERICAN POETS

By JOHN GOULD FLETCHER

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POETRY AND DRAMA : a quarterly periodical, appeared four times in 1913 and four times in 1914. Then its publication was suspended on account of the war.

Its object was to provide a complete record of the poetry and drama of the day.

Its place has been filled since the war by other periodicals planned on similar lines.

THE CHAPBOOK first appeared in July, 1919, as a substitute for *Poetry and Drama*. It is published about the middle of each month. The following is a list of the numbers that have already appeared :—

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See also p. 3 of Cover [*facing p. 44*].

Some Contemporary American Poets

PART I.

I.

THE present revival of poetry in America had its origin twenty-five years ago, when Edwin Arlington Robinson published his first slender book containing *The Torrent and the Night Before*, a collection which a year later was merged in the better known title of *The Children of the Night*. Before this date, which, be it noted, was but two years previous to the Spanish-American War, the domestically accepted standard of American poetry had been the more polite, optimistic, facile verse of New England, the work of Longfellow, Whittier, Bryant, Holmes, and Lowell. Poe and Whitman had found their audiences abroad rather than at home. It fell to the lot of a son of New England to break with the popular view of poetry as a polite entertainment, and to provide his country with poems which, though conceived and executed with the strictest regard for tradition, contained nevertheless a darker and more poignant gospel.

It is not my purpose here to examine all of Robinson's books in detail, and therefore I must necessarily omit consideration of his prose plays, as well as of his long quasi-narrative in blank verse, *Merlin*. My purpose is rather to concentrate attention on the most salient aspects of the work of certain prominent poets in the United States, with the aim of showing what each has accomplished. For the purposes of this study I therefore adopt the point of view of an average intelligent foreigner who happens to have heard little of American poetry, and who wishes to learn something about it. I am therefore obliged to omit from consideration the small but important group of American poets at present residing in England, for the reason that they are immediately accessible, whereas those with whom I deal are not. A foreigner

might require to be told that Robinson is not only first in point of date among modern American poets, but in many respects first in regard to sheer intellectual ability. This intellectual ability is displayed, not in any special versatility in handling the subject-matter of poetry (in this respect he is indeed singularly limited), but in a new way of looking at life.

Pick up any book of Robinson's which you will and you will find a great number of poems devoted to the subject of lives, imagined or real, which were actually or apparently failures. John Everedown, Richard Cory, Miniver Cheevy, Luke Haver-gal, Cliff Klingenhagen, Charles Carville, George Crabbe, Annandale, Flammonde, Lincoln—the list is endless. Against the American who preaches success, efficiency, "hustle," Robinson has always raised a voice in protest. And his voice is the voice of the New England conscience, or rather of what was left of that conscience after the wave of industrialism, cheap immigrant labour, and dollar-hunting swept over New England in the 'seventies, at the beginning of which period he was born. Robinson's mission to America has therefore been that of a lonely upholder of lost ideals. He has shown us wherein we have failed. The spectacle is not pleasant, and grows particularly painful in the case of such a poem as his upon Lincoln, the concealed deadly irony of which is probably lost upon most Americans.

By this steadfast respect for ideals which proved inadequate to hold back the disruptive tides of scientific commercialism, as by his insistence upon the darker side of life itself, Robinson has shown himself spiritually akin to Thomas Hardy. Certain differences are instructive. Robinson has nothing of Hardy's un-failing delight in nature, nothing of his ability to paint unforgettable landscapes. Indeed, I know only of one poem of his which contains a recognisable American landscape—the aptly named *Fragment in The Man Against the Sky*, which is really a fragment of decayed New England. Elsewhere he writes verse which, in almost every case, is that of a dweller in cities. His pre-occupation is with men and women, rather than with the unconscious forces which shape them. For this reason, it is as a sharp

biting etcher of individual portraits that we read him. In this, as in his love for cryptic ironical statement, he resembles closely the later Browning (the Browning of *Parleyings*). But, on the whole, he is far keener in his outlook upon human defects than Browning. Browning could never have written *The Field of Glory*, for instance, or *Cassandra*. So it is as a definitely New England product that we must take his poetry—a product owning certain affinities to Browning, Hardy, or Crabbe, but with a sharp, sub-acid, quality of its own.

His last book, if we except the inferior *Merlin*, contains his best work, and reveals more clearly than any other his qualities and defects. The poem which gives the book its title, *The Man Against the Sky*, is an epitome of his philosophy. Here are its opening stanzas :—

“ Between me and the sunset, like a dome
Against the glory of a world on fire,
Now loomed a sudden hill
Bleak, round, and high, by flame-lit height made higher,
With nothing on it for the flame to kill
Save one who moved and was alone up there
To loom before the chaos and the glare
As if he were the last god going home
Unto his last desire.
Dark, marvellous, and inscrutable he moved on
Till down the fiery distance he was gone,
Like one of those eternal, remote things
That range across a man’s imaginings
When a sure music fills him and he knows
What he may say thereafter to few men,
The touch of ages having wrought
An echo or a glimpse of what he thought
A phantom or a legend until then.”

This opening, more rich and full in colour than almost anything in Robinson’s work, merges into the usual grey doubts and questionings. Faced with this symbol of humanity, the poet

frankly confesses that he cannot tell us where he is going, or why he exists at all. All knowledge concerning mankind resolves itself into a series of negatives :—

“ No soft evangel of equality
Self-cradled in a communal repose
That huddles into death, and may at last
Be covered well with equatorial snows—
And all for what, the devil only knows—
Will aggregate an inkling to confirm
The credit of a sage or of a worm. . . .
No planetary trap where souls are wrought
For nothing but the sake of being caught
And sent again to nothing will attune
Itself to any key of any reason
Why man should hunger through another season
To find out why 'twere better late than soon
To go away, and let the sun and moon
And all the silly stars illuminate
A place for creeping things ;
And those that root and trumpet and have wings
And herd and ruminare,
Or dive and flash and poise in rivers or seas,
Or by their loyal tails in lofty trees
Hang screeching lewd victorious derision
Of man's immortal vision.”

So absolute is this scepticism that it seeks to create the very faith it denies. The poet offers no comfort to the world beyond that of “an Orient Word that will not be erased,” “the living Word no man has ever spelt.” But the concluding passages, with their insistence either upon complete faith or on sheer immediate annihilation, somehow fail to carry conviction. Robinson may have felt the need for faith, but has he found it? The answer is doubtful. But in stating this problem for America, he has done more than any other man living to make a new American poetry possible.

II.

If Robinson's poetry clearly presents the mind of New England, the poetry of Robert Frost no less clearly presents its heart. Yet Frost is neither temperamentally nor by birth a New Englander. His father found himself so much at variance with his New England neighbours that he not only sympathised with the cause of the South in the Civil War, but gave to his son the name of the great Southern leader, Lee. And the future poet was not only born in San Francisco, but spent the first ten years of his life there. It was only the accident of a return to New England that fixed upon the sensitive plate of Robert Frost's temperament the scenes and characters with which he has made us familiar.

People in Europe generally suffer from a mistaken impression that the West is the wildest part of America. This is not the case. The West, except for one or two "National" Parks, and a few stretches of desert, is decidedly the most cultivated part of the United States. The true region of wildness lies at the threshold of the European visitor arriving in New York. It is in Northern Massachusetts, Maine, Vermont, New Hampshire, the backwoods of New England; the "North of Boston" of Frost's most famous book.

This part of America has the melancholy charm of a country which was once prosperous and cultivated, but which has since fallen into decay. At the time of the Revolution it was a rich agricultural country. Since the opening-out of the West and the development of New England industry it has been gradually emptied of its population, until what remains of the old New England agricultural stock—the true descendants of the *Mayflower* pilgrims—have dwindled in numbers and in prosperity, and have practically given up agriculture, living on stock-raising, apple-growing, and the like. In the last few years many of the deserted and half-overgrown farms have again become populated by Finns, Norwegians, and the like, thanks to the overcrowding of immigrants into the great industrial centres. But it is not with

these people that Frost deals, but with the remnant of the original stock—a remnant tough, obstinate, reserved, weakened in fibre through intermarriage, half-crazed in many cases through the combined spiritual and physical loneliness of long winters, few neighbours, the chill isolations of Puritanism. It is with these people, and with the scenes of their daily lives, that Frost has dealt faithfully. In a sense, he has been but an instrument in their hands.

Throughout his work one is faced with the feeling that Robert Frost is only a recording instrument, and one which functions only under compulsion. He is a fastidiously slow worker, and many of the poems in *North of Boston* have developed from a germ which lay latent in his mind for years. In some cases the first idea of a poem was duly committed to paper, to be printed in the *Youths' Companion*, and was taken up later on to be expanded, subtilized, re-cast. I believe that *The Death of the Hired Man* was so treated. Thus the composition of many of his poems, and the gradual evolution of them into their final form, has taken a great number of years. Insatiably he seeks the quintessential features of a vanishing state of society. His is the most carefully weighed, the most mature poetry now being written in America.

In order to render with finality what may be called, without irony, the most completely finished and exhausted aspect of America—the aspect of Northern New England—Frost has evolved a form peculiar to himself, and which even he does not always handle with equal success; the rambling quasi-narrative, conversational, blank-verse poem, of which *The Death of the Hired Man*, *The Mountain*, *A Servant to Servants*, *The Fear*, *The Woodpile*, *In the Home Stretch*, *Birches*, are the most conspicuous examples.

These poems may owe, conceivably, something to Robinson, who essayed the same type less successfully in his *Isaac and Archibald*, which, I believe, dates back to 1902. But to whatever poet Frost may owe the germ of the form that is his, it is certain that he alone has handled it most richly.

This form is based upon commonplace incidents, told as far as possible in the language of common speech. Frost has attempted to revive blank verse by means of restoring the connection, lost since Elizabethan days, between the common tongue and the language of literature. But since the figures with which he is familiar live greyer, more colourless, more confined lives than the Elizabethans, and employ a less rich vocabulary, he employs in the place of dramatic climax a subtler reverberation. His poetry is intended to echo in our hearts, to attract us by a sense of sympathy, rather than to uplift us by a feeling of heroic conflict. It is poetry deliberately written without "purple patches," as the late Edward Thomas, possibly the most sincere follower Frost ever had, long ago recognised. It is poetry filled with a brooding sense of mystical kinship with nature which is almost Celtic (one suspects a Celtic strain in Frost, such as existed in Thomas). And in its deliberate avoidance of definite conclusions about the world, as in its employment of carefully differentiated repetitions of the same thought, it recalls the poetry of the great Chinese poets, familiar to us through Mr. Waley's translations.

For this reason Frost is something more than a New England poet. By his deliberate refusal to employ dialect speech (a wise omission), by his quiet observation that always shines through his scenes and figures, he has raised himself to universal stature. It is only by accident that he has been selected by destiny to render New England, or any part of America. He knows this well enough, and in several more poignant and personal poems he has looked upon New England as having been in a sense a frustration of a higher destiny he might have obtained. These poems, which are, contrary to his usual practice, in rhyme, are by no means the least of his achievements. To read *After Apple-Picking*, *The Road Not Taken*, *The Sound of Trees*, and many pieces in *A Boy's Will* is to understand the brooding, sensitive soul of a great poet.

III.

The third American poet whom I have to consider is one whose work and personality enjoy a greater vogue in America than that of either Robinson or Frost. Yet this work, typical as it is of certain strains in the American temperament which essentially differentiate the inhabitant of the United States from the Englishman, has never—perhaps for that very reason—been received with favour in England. It is poetry which neither searches the heart so deeply as Frost's nor stimulates the brain as Robinson's ; and yet it possesses the relentless driving power of an energy which its possessor claims as an inheritance from her Yankee ancestors. I am referring to the poetry of Miss Amy Lowell.

Perhaps it is necessary to have breathed the light, champagne-like air of a New England winter to be able to appreciate Miss Lowell's poetry ; perhaps it is necessary to have known the sensation of the tourist who first steps ashore on a blazing day in the midst of New York's opulent exuberance ; perhaps it is necessary to be able to sacrifice many deeper and subtler overtones of poetry for the sake of sheer brilliance of surface. I do not know, but of one thing I am certain : that Miss Lowell's poetry *is* a poetry of purely surface appearance. Has anyone ever read her best and most deeply-felt volume, *Men, Women and Ghosts*, through from cover to cover ? From such an experience the mind emerges dizzied, the senses aching, the nerves unstrung, by the endless succession of sheer dazzling surface emotions that are swept past one incessantly, without hint of a third dimension. And the case is still worse with that book's successor, *Can Grande's Castle*. It is true that in her latest volume, *Pictures of the Floating World*, there is an attempt towards a return to a quieter, more persuasive type of poetry ; but even that volume contains such sheer racketing earthquakes of surface sensibility as *Gargoyles*, *Motor Lights on a Hill Road*, or *The Broken Fountain*.

Miss Lowell's poetry springs from the rampant prosperity, the blatant successfulness, of America. Like that prosperity and successfulness, it dazzles the beholder at the outset ; later on, he perceives vaguely that something is lacking, some finer shade of

meaning, some deeper spiritual ideal, some nobler conception of humanity. But since that prosperity and successfulness are very serious facts in this world of ours, so Miss Lowell's poetry is a very serious fact. One must take it for what it is, and see what one can make of it. Critical England, which has seen the elements of a distinguished novelist in Mr. Joseph Hergesheimer, cannot deny to Miss Lowell (who is in one sense Mr. Hergesheimer's counterpart) the title of an eminent poet.

The first fact, then, about Miss Lowell's poetry is that it is two-dimensional : it has length and breadth, but, with certain exceptions, no depth. On the point of higher spiritual ideals, as regards the possible destiny of suffering, struggling man, it is completely dumb. Miss Lowell dismisses the thought of other worlds than ours with a gesture of contempt. Herein she stands at the opposite pole to another New England poetess, Emily Dickinson, who used the visible world as a medium to see through to that Eternity which she spent her life in seeking. Miss Lowell's poetry, on the other hand, is always poetry of sharp, objective fact. It is even fact made slightly artificial by being deliberately handled by its possessor in such a way as to bring out its most strikingly picturesque side. For this reason she has drawn upon books of history and memoirs for a great many of her themes. There is no doubt that, had she been born, say, in the Elizabethan age, she might have been a great rival in drama of Ben Jonson or Beaumont and Fletcher. But she would never have attained to Webster's moral passion, Dekker's sympathy, Marlowe's or Chapman's grandeur, or Shakespeare's all-penetrative searching of the heart. Despite her energy, she has little to say about this world of ours. She sees it, and that for her is sufficient.

Nevertheless, this ability to see the world—the mere surface of things—is an ability not to be despised, and the mere act of seeing, freshly ventured and continuously repeated, produces certain virtues, even if it does not add to our actual insight into life. It enables us, for instance, to understand something of America's superficial aspect. It shows us that the world is curiously varied, and that there is little apparent connection, on the surface, between

these variations. In short, such vision is, as Miss Lowell has said, "unrelated." And the result is this, in the case of a camouflaged troopship :—

Lines :
Rising from the water,
Curled round and over,
Whirled, scattered,
Drawn upon one another, . . .
Hair lines incessantly moving
Broad bands of black turning evenly over emptiness, . . .
Teasing the eye with indefinite motion,
Coming from nothing
Ending without cessation :
Drowned hair drifting against mother of pearl,
Kelp-aprons
Shredded on a yellow beach,
Black spray
Sprinkled over cream white wave-tops.

No one could ever have written this, or a hundred other precisely similar poems, who had not been born the descendant of a line of Yankee merchant-princes, each with his eye upon the immediately practical. Cinematographic such art undoubtedly is, but yet we may question whether America's best art is not cinematographic. It must be remembered that neither Frost nor Robinson write as Americans to Americans. Theirs is always the standpoint of the detached mature observer. Miss Lowell, on the other hand, writes always as an American. Even at its most sophisticated, there is always something childlike about her art.

Yet there are hints of a deeper intimacy here and there in her poems, especially in the volume, *Men, Women, and Ghosts*. Not only do we have here four poems definitely dealing with New England life, written in the dialect-speech which Frost has perhaps wisely avoided, but the feeling of New England is present elsewhere also. True, there is no feeling of New England in *Malmaison*, which presents Miss Lowell's most successfully-drawn woman, the Empress Josephine (all of Miss Lowell's

women are a little like Dresden china shepherdesses, and Josephine is no exception, but she lives in this prose poem). But the feeling of New England floods *A Roxbury Garden* : it crosses the Atlantic in the shipbuilding scene in *The Hammers* : it half-spoils the background of such a poem as *The Cross-Roads* and wholly spoils *The Cremona Violin*. And, strangest thing of all, both sections of the poem called " 1777 " are full of it. The second part of this poem is supposed to deal with Venice. But has anyone ever pictured Venice as a " City of Falling Leaves " ? Such a city, one may be sure, is much nearer in actual geography to Beacon Hill, Boston, Massachusetts. Pare off the trappings of this poem—perhaps the best thing Miss Lowell has written—and one gets cultivated Boston society as it has existed for the last quarter-century. The same superficiality, the same weariness, the same exhausted concealed hankering of the flesh. And the leaves are falling on it all, forever falling.

PART II.

I.

THE poetry which I have just examined, that produced by what we may call the older New England group, did not by any means exhaust the new forces which in America were tending to self-expression. About the period 1912-13, when the New England group first began to attain to some prominence, there appeared also on the horizon another group, the elements of whose nurture had been drawn from the very different scenes and circumstances of the Middle West. As the main directions of the former were towards the cities of New York and of Boston, so this latter gravitated towards Chicago and, to a lesser degree, the city of Saint Louis. But they were unvoiced and unknown until the happy founding of two periodicals, *Poetry*, of Chicago, and *Reedy's Mirror*, of Saint Louis, gave them their opportunity.

The Middle West is the backbone of America. It is the force

that swung Presidential elections, from the date of Lincoln's coming into power, up to President Wilson's second term in office. Except for the employment of this force, it is otherwise dumb. Stretching from the great lakes southwards to the line of the Ohio and the Ozarks, westward over Kansas, Iowa, Nebraska, until it mingles with the foothills of the Rockies, this great prairie country presents a thousand miles of landscape of which the sole salient feature is its immense flatness and monotony. Except in certain widely scattered centres of population, to which foreign immigration has contributed much, and which are both hideously utilitarian and blatantly industrial, the population of this great plain is definitely Anglo-Saxon and agricultural. Up to the twentieth century, this population had all the characteristic traits of agricultural Protestantism—an insatiable respect only for the externals of worldly prosperity, a narrow inability to see beyond its own horizon, a coarseness of fibre which expressed itself by taking over from Puritanism its ugliest traits—the hatred of beauty, refinement, art. Dickens drew indelible types of its society in Martin Chuzzlewit, and since Dickens' day many an unprejudiced European observer, escaping from the carefully cultivated salons of New York or Boston, has looked upon it and lost hope in a country which could draw its strength from anything so soul-destroying and dull.

Yet the Middle West has produced, accidentally, at least two geniuses—Lincoln, the failure at every job, who learned through failure alone the ability to see into every man's heart ; and also Grant, the inarticulate, driving power, who broke, with his raw Illinois farmer boys, the skill and might of the South at Vicksburg and before Richmond.

There is something of Lincoln and Grant in the work of Edgar Lee Masters, but there is also another quality—which was probably responsible for his abandoning law and becoming a writer—the quality of Puritan New England, to which he is akin by inheritance. When *Spoon River Anthology* was first printed in America, its sheer brilliance as a document unfolding the social life of any small Middle Western community during the

generation after the Civil War (from 1870 to 1900) led the public to overlook its defects as poetry, as well as the more important fact that it was in no way characteristic of its author. As a plain record of life lived in the midst of a decayed and vanishing society it is invaluable ; its minute exactness of detail, extending even to the proper names, sets America before us more clearly than any other work. But it was written simply as a dispassionate record of what the author knew already by heart, having spent twenty-one years in the midst of the society he describes, quitting it at last because "the pathos of the country depressed my imagination indescribably." In his inmost soul Masters has always striven to write from other motives. We, with three other volumes besides *Spoon River* to guide us, may be permitted to ask what those motives were.

In the first place, Masters is a poet without any traditional background. His education has been haphazard, desultory ; during his early years, when the formative influences of literature should have exerted their strongest pressure upon him, he was only able to read by fits and starts ; he has always been forced to work independently—to do without the guidance of people of maturer intelligence. For over twenty years, before writing *Spoon River*, he wasted his energy in attempting to imitate other poets—Burns, Shelley, Swinburne, the Elizabethans, Ibsen. This struggle was less an attempt to express something than to escape from his surroundings. Then, finally, at forty-five, he set himself to the task of merely recording his surroundings as they had impressed themselves upon him, and the result was *Spoon River*. But merely to record was not enough. He must build something better. He must express the thwarted, tortured longing for beauty which had burned in his soul.

In this light the most characteristic work Masters has ever done is, I think, to be found in his volume, *The Great Valley*. Here is all the dullness and prolixity of the later Wordsworth. Masters is, unfortunately, one of those writers who are born without a sense of humour. But in the midst of this tedious sermonising there is also something else, which we can at least

respect. There is the flame of Christian charity in the *Gospel of Mark*; there is the fierce Puritanic hatred of conventional morality in *Steam Shovel Cut*; there is ecstasy of a stolen moment of beauty in *The Subway*; and certainly the heart-tug of an old memory in *I shall never see you again*. Above all, there is a cold, just appraisal of America's material success and spiritual failure. This is brought out most clearly in *Cato Braden*, the study of a failure, and in the first eight poems, which form a connected series, carrying the history of the Middle West from the founding of Fort Dearborn, in 1803, down to the present.

These poems are too long to quote, but in the most striking of them—the badly-named *Autochthon*—Masters grapples with a great idea. His aim is nothing less than to contrast European civilisation, nourished in tradition, or proceeding by harmonious evolution out of tradition, with the American genius which is so crushed by the poverty of its outward circumstances that it burns inward, feeding on life itself. To accomplish this task, Masters has chosen the careers of three men born in the same year—Alfred Tennyson, Charles Darwin, Abraham Lincoln—and contrasts them, step by step. And the result is the most solidly impressive poem Masters has written. It is a poem which everyone must read who wishes to understand what America is.

Master's method of photographic realism has prevented him from being a great poet; as regards technique he is scarcely a poet at all. *Spoon River* is written in a free verse barely removed from prose, and the later works are mostly in a blank verse of most jogtrot description. But at least, in *The Great Valley*, he sees clearly what is needed for poetry to flourish in America—a clearing of the ground. Let those who think that America is uncritical of her own shortcomings read this condemnation :—

“ You are a hollow thing of steel, a cauldron ;
No monument of freedom.
You're lettered, it is true,
With many luminous truths. . . .
But inside you there is a seething compost

Of public schools, the ballot, journalism,
Laws, jurisprudence, dogma, gold the chief
Ingredient of all, stirred into a brew
Wherewith to feed yourself and keep yourself
The thing you are !
Not wholly slave, not really free,
Desiring vaguely to be master-moral,
And yet too sicklied over by old truths,
The ballot, fear, plebeian spirit, lack of mind
Hermaphroditic giant, misty-eyed,
Half-blinded by ideals, half by greed ! ”

II.

The work of Edgar Lee Masters stated the problem of poetry in the Middle West in its most acute form. To the solution of that problem have come two other poets, widely differing in the surroundings of their lives, their circumstances, their traditions.

If variety of experience can make a poet, Carl Sandburg should be a great poet. He has been everything by turns—the driver of a milk-wagon, a scene-shifter in a theatre, a pusher of a truck at a brick-works, a railway construction hand, a dish-washer, a farmer’s hand, a soldier in the Spanish-American war, the tenant of a gaol, a student at college, a social worker, a newspaper man. The outstanding fact about him, however, is not that he has been all these things, but rather that he is the son of an unlettered Swedish immigrant. This at once gives his poetry a different quality from the work of any of those with whom I have already dealt.

The great immigrant masses which were lured to America during the years 1870-1914 came with the notion in their heads that they were about to find the Land of Promise, the land where liberty ruled, where unlimited equal prosperity offered itself, where fraternity was not a vain word. The disillusionment that followed was equal in each case. But, according as the immigrants came from the South and East of Europe or from the North and West, they reacted differently. Those from the

South and East reacted the more violently. Some of these, accepting the state of affairs, threw themselves into the task of making enough money to get back to their homes with a fortune, or to become "bosses" of their kind. Others, beaten in the race, became agitators, strikers, rebels. In short, to use an American phrase, they did not make such "good citizens" as did the Teutons and Scandinavians from the North and West. These, after their disillusionment, settled down to make the most of things in their new home. And it is from this latter class that Carl Sandburg has come.

There is a message of endurance written large across his poetry. It is not for nothing that Sandburg stands closer to Whitman's method of handling than any poet in America to-day. For Whitman endured thirty-five years of obscure poverty before settling down to the task of writing, and about twenty-five more years of obloquy and neglect before the world began to listen to his message. This sturdy quality of individual heroic endurance, which Whitman obtained from his Dutch ancestors, finds an equal in Sandburg's granite-like quality, which he obtains from his Scandinavian forebears.

But Sandburg, unfortunately for us, did not launch himself into the world with a *Song of Myself*. His apprenticeship at newspaper work and the fact that America during the years when he grew to maturity had become a land where public opinion had given place to opinion created and fostered by newspapers made all the difference. His first bid for fame was with his poem on Chicago—"Hog-Butcher for the World, Tool Maker, Stacker of Wheat, Player with the Railroads, and the Nation's Freight Handler." This poem is in reality nothing but an expanded newspaper paragraph. It is tainted with the two great plagues of America—spread-eagle bombast and the inability to distinguish between material prosperity and the finer spiritual values. Whatever the poet's motives may have been in writing it, it is in no way characteristic of the finer shades of his work.

Much better, and much more characteristic of America's

haphazard juxtaposition of sheer ugliness and beauty, is the following :—

“ Passing through ugly and huddled walls
By doorways where women
Looked from their hunger-deep eyes,
Haunted with shadows of hunger-hands,
Out from the huddled and ugly walls,
I came suddenly at the city’s edge,
On a blue burst of lake,
Long lake waves breaking under the sun
On a spray-flung curve of shore ;
And a fluttering storm of gulls,
Masses of great gray wings
And flying white bellies
Veering and wheeling free in the open.”

This ability to place in juxtaposition the sense of free nature with the observation of the tortured, thwarted life of industrial civilisation is Sandburg’s most salient feature. It saves him from being a materialist and a realist. Closely allied to this quality is another, more mystical quality, which enables him to look on all human life as a spiritual warfare, endlessly renewed ; a search for the unattainable.

The poems written on this theme are, I think, his best. The two sections of his first book, which are entitled *The Road and the End* and *Fogs and Fires*, are his most solid contributions to poetry. There are the poems called *The Road and the End* (perhaps the most beautiful poem he has ever written), *Graves* (which is almost equally as fine), *The Answer, Our Prayer of Thanks, Joy, Nocturne in a Deserted Brickyard*, and the vivid *Young Sea*. In these poems Sandburg seizes alternately the facts of nature and of human destiny to see through them to some unknown conclusion. This is the mystic method employed by Blake and others—to see *through* realities, not *with* realities—and Sandburg was the first poet in America to employ it.

These sections of his first volume, as well as the early war poems, led many people to build large hopes on his future. So

far he had shown promise of producing the rarest kind of poetry—the poetry which flowers out of experience, out of personality, into the immutable and absolute. But with his second volume these hopes of his admirers became a little dashed. *Cornhuskers*, as this volume is called, brings us face to face with this poet's limitations.

The limitations are many, and first among them may be mentioned the limitations of technique and of style. Sandburg has never been able to get beyond the most elementary rhythmic forms. These rhythms, whether printed as poetry or as prose, shackle his effort and tend to make him short-winded. The attempts in *Cornhuskers* to do long poems—such as *Prairie*—break down for the reason that so many of Whitman's poems break down—they are mere strings of disconnected lines rather than rounded wholes.

There is also a second and more serious limitation. Somewhere in this second volume Sandburg pictures himself as sitting in a chair and reading, forever reading, the newspapers. This appetite for journalism, this preoccupation in the affairs of his own day, has gone far to ruin him for serious and sustained effort. No artist can concern himself exclusively with the ephemeral events of his time without damage to his soul. He must see through them to the eternal, enduring realities. This is what Sandburg seems largely incapable of doing. He has experienced, but he has also imperfectly freed himself from experience.

Yet there are signs still, even in this second volume, that he is capable of breaking free from narrow propaganda into a wider vision of reality. A few, short poems—*Valley Song*, *Prayers of Steel*, and also *Cool Tombs* and *Grass*—show this attitude. In *Prayers of Steel* he has successfully wrested American effort into a new kind of symbolism :—

“ Lay me on an anvil, O God.
Beat and hammer me into a crowbar.
Let me pry loose old walls,
Let me lift and loosen old foundations.

Lay me on an anvil, O God.
Beat me and hammer me into a steel spike.
Drive me into the girders that hold a skyscraper together,
Take red-hot rivets and fasten me into the central girders.
Let me be the great nail holding a skyscraper
Through blue nights into white stars."

The same handling of symbolism is to be found in the long poem, *Smoke and Steel*, which appeared in *Poetry* for February, 1920, and which is, so far, the best-sustained effort Sandburg has given us.

III.

The difficulties that beset the critic in attempting to appraise the value of the work of Masters or Sandburg cease to exist when one comes to Vachel Lindsay. Here is a poet who, in effect, lays all his wares upon the counter and invites the public, rather than the intelligent, to be judge of them. The result is, that you either like them extremely, in which case you pick Lindsay as the only American poet, or you dislike them so much as to declare that Lindsay is not a poet at all. Neither attitude is, however, altogether the true one.

Lindsay is a reformer first and a poet afterwards. Born of strong Kentucky mountain stock—a Scotch Calvinist by birth and by inheritance (the American *Who's Who* states him to be a member of the Christian Disciples Church)—he is, above all, an itinerant preacher. He recalls, in a different way, another itinerant preacher—Robert Louis Stevenson. The difference between them is simply that Lindsay is less of an artist, more robustious, more democratic. In short, he is an American.

Lindsay's gospel is extremely simple. He believes that America should become not only the most prosperous country on earth but the greatest art-producing country. He wants all Americans to become artists. Linked with this idea is the corollary that art can only be produced by the community at large. With true Puritan intolerance Lindsay has attempted to make all his work an illustration of this prevailing creed. It does

not always do so, however. That fact, conjoined to a saving sense of humour, has been his salvation.

It is beyond the purposes of this essay to ask the question whether these theories of art are true or not. What matters is the result of those theories ; and in producing his work Lindsay hit upon one unexpected piece of good fortune. It is impossible to produce this community-art which he dreams of without first paying attention to the thing which expresses the life of the community—that is, folk-lore. Now America has practically no folk-lore except the Indian, which requires a very different type of brain from the average Anglo-Saxon to appreciate it. The only other folk-lore which America has produced, and which it is in any way capable of instant understanding, was that invented by the American negro in slavery. And Lindsay lived far enough South to come into contact with the negro spirit, without living so far South as to instinctively despise it.

The result of his immersion into the stream of negro folk-lore is written visibly across the pages not only of *The Congo*, which is his best book, but also across all the others. The negro not only gave to Lindsay the peculiar syncopation of metre which is his sign-manual as a technician, but also that mingling of religious fervour with naive grotesque which makes the substance of his poems. Anyone who has heard the old negro “ spirituals ” sung must recognise this. For instance :—

“ When Israel dwelt in Egypt’s land,—
Go down, Moses—
Oppressed so hard they could not stand :
Let my people go !
Thus saith the Lord, bold Moses said,
Let my people go !
If not I’ll strike your firstborn dead ;
Let my people go ! ”

Does not this contain the germ of “ Booth led loudly with the big bass drum—Are you washed in the blood of the Lamb ? ” or “ Mumbo-Jumbo, the God of the Congo—Mumbo-Jumbo will

hoodoo you," or any one of a dozen of Lindsay's best-known poems?

If the matter had stopped here, no more need be said. But unfortunately Lindsay has not stopped here. It was not enough for him to write *The Congo*, *The Santa Fé Trail*, *The Kallyope Yell*, and dozens of other good negro or quasi-negro poems. He must also teach audiences to sing them. His art must be, above all things, democratic. So he invented the poem-game, in which the audience is called upon to join in shouting the refrain, and devised the "higher Vaudeville imagination" to account for not only his own art, but also that of the Greeks. Starved as he is of art of any kind, and admitting only the kind of art that immediately gets into the brains of the multitude, he has gone so far as to bless the cinema, which is the only form of art that most Americans care for, and to write poems to Mary Pickford. And doubtless, in all good faith, he takes such things as "The Daniel Jazz" seriously.

But it is impossible to take them seriously. We may wish with all our hearts that this age did not show such a serious breach between the artist and the public; we may even hope for America the new birth of democratic art; but art is eternally one thing, and journalism is another. Much of Lindsay's work is journalism, just as, in a different sense, much of Miss Lowell's work is journalism. It does not measure up to the immutable standards of style or subject. It does not quicken the imagination. There is in it immense noise and energy, but America does not need more noise and energy, but rather an escape from them. This escape Lindsay does not provide.

As I have already said, the one thing that saves this poet is his sense of humour. The poem called *The Congo* is better than either *The Santa Fé Trail* or *The Fireman's Ball* (the latter is a particularly vicious piece of moralising) because it is less ethical, more funny. And better than either are the two Chinese poems, *The Chinese Nightingale* and *The Empire of China is Tumbling Down*. Lindsay is thoroughly at his best whenever he is simply playing with rockets, lanterns, and outlandish costumes. He is indeed a superb nonsense poet—a broader Lewis Carroll or

Edward Lear—as the recently appearing *Golden Whales of California* will testify.

Rarely does he successfully strike the deeper notes of poetry. The war-poems at the end of *The Congo* are samples of his utter failure to see the larger issues of human destiny. He seriously supposes that the war was entirely caused by the mad ambition of certain kings, and that the peasants did not acquiesce in their own slaughter. And it is a well-known fact that, when America entered the war, he became an ardent supporter of Conscription and of the Sedition Act, which muzzled the American press. He even dreamed for a time of applying the “family album” test to citizenship—only those being admitted who could show ancestry stretching back to the Revolution.

He has completely failed to learn the lesson of his own early poem, *The Eagle that is Forgotten*. With the exception of *The Broncho who would Not be Broken*, which is a glorification of the outlaw, it is the most impressive poem he has written. It turns to ashes that creed which he himself preaches, the creed which would make the voice of the majority the voice of God.

PART III.

I.

FROM the consideration of the foregoing poets I might go on to other sections of the United States—the South, the Far West—and put the question: Why is it that so little comparatively has been produced by these sections? To answer such a question would involve an otiose discussion, and would add nothing to anyone’s knowledge of American poetry. Far better to pass on to another group of American poets who are distinguished from the two preceding not only by being born in the decade succeeding those I have just mentioned, but also because they became, at an early age, either voluntary exiles from the United States or poets expressing themselves by violent reaction to the monotonous uniformity of American life.

The first of the exiles in point of time, and perhaps also in eminence, is Ezra Pound. Pound came to Europe about 1908, and spent a year wandering in Italy, France and Spain before settling in London. There he published in the following year *Personæ*, which was so successful that it was almost immediately followed by *Exultations* in the same year. After a return visit to America in 1911, which only served to disgust him completely with his native country (unfortunately for him, this visit antedated the American revival of interest in poetry by two years), he published *Ripostes* in 1912.* In 1913, having been five years in Europe, he collected together most of the pieces later published in *Lustra* (hence the title), and in 1915 he published the results of his work on Fenellosa's manuscript notes (which came into his hands a year before) under the title of *Cathay*. What poetry he has since written will be found in the recent *Quia Pauper Amavi* (1919).

I have made this brief historical note in order to clear away certain misconceptions. In all his work since 1912 (with the sole exception of *Cathay*) Pound has, I think, quite unjustifiably, put greater stress upon his own personal attitude to life, to literature, to members of his own profession, and to society generally, than upon his poetry. He has said in effect that the thing that matters is Ezra Pound and his opinions—not poetry in itself and for its own sake, but poetry for the sake of expressing a man's personal attitude and reaction to what lies about him. This is certainly a mistake on his part. The mere strong expression of one's likes and dislikes does not make any man a poet, and to go about continually thumping the public on its head for its stupidity leads merely to putting oneself on the level of the public, not above it. Nor is Pound in any way well equipped for the job of being a satirist. The earlier volumes show a temperament utterly opposed to the satiric. In these volumes, as in *Cathay*,

* I have omitted *Canzone*, 1911, and also *Sonnets and Ballate of Guido Cavalcanti*, both of which seem to me slighter work—Pound trying to fit himself into the Victorian order of Rossetti or Yeats.

there is only the restless seeker after beauty—a beauty hard, bright, tangible, vividly American in its abrupt quality of definition, if not in its *mise-en-scène*.

Is it too much to suppose that the search for this beauty, which led Pound back to twelfth-century Provence, to mediæval Italy, to Greece finally and ancient China, came to him primarily from the keen, vivid atmosphere of America, and from his hatred of the prevailing commercial ugliness, so utterly unsuited to that atmosphere? At all events, in *Personæ* Pound had not yet found himself. He was still struggling with vestiges of what he calls the “crepuscular.” It was in *Exultations* that he became master of his own material, and in this book he produced poetry such as no Englishman could ever write. The nearest things to these poems by an Englishman are some of Richard Aldington’s early pre-war poems. Compare these with Pound, and the difference leaps to the eye. Aldington is cool, detached, impersonal. Pound, though deriving perhaps nine-tenths of his inspiration from Italian or Provençal literature, lives himself a vivid life in each of these poems :—

“ Lo, I have seen thee bound about with dreams.
Lo, I have known thy heart and its desire ;
Life, all of it, my sea, and all men’s streams
Are fused in it as flames of an altar fire ! ”

This, from the very first poem in *Exultations*, sets the note.

Exultations certainly contains more gold than anything this poet has done. *Sestina Altaforte*, *Pierre Vidal Old*, *Ballad of the Goodly Fere*, *Sestina for Ysolt*, *Portrait, Francesca*, *On His Own Face in a Glass*, *Defiance*, *Nils Lykke*, *Alba Innominata*—it seems strange that the hand which wrote these poems could ever have descended to the trumpery smartness of *Homage to Propertius* or to the subfusc pedantry of *Three Cantos*. For these poems have all the vivid energy of a young race. Even at their most bookish, they are bookish in a different sense from European bookishness. The European of the present day when he desires to live in the past surrounds himself with echoes. Pound, you

feel sure, might quite easily have lived with Bertran de Born, or even Villon, held rhyming bouts and drinking bouts with them, and broken their pates if necessary.

Strange that the demon of climate, requickening the old shreds of Anglo-Saxon stock, should have produced out of western North America this vivid spirit of flame! Strange, but also tragic. Pound has never been at home in twentieth-century Europe. He can only get life out of books—from the life about him, he can obtain nothing. Something prompts him, therefore, to mock the world he sees, because he hates it; and when he mocks, the vividness utterly abandons him. The smile becomes a leer, the attitude a pose, the dependence on other men's work assumes the dimensions of intolerable pedantry. Technically Pound's later work is even more interesting than his earlier. The *vers libre* experiments of *Ripostes* and *Cathay*, the free, broken blank verse of *Near Perigord* and *Three Cantos*, are fascinating things to study. But except where he follows faithfully some other work, as in *Cathay*, the poems in these last two volumes are almost valueless. They are "a broken bundle of mirrors," the patchwork and debris of a mind which has never quite been able to find the living, vivid beauty it set out to seek. As a pioneer, as a treader in unbroken paths, America can afford to salute the earlier, as it is forced to reject the later Pound; and a whole host of modern American poets could never have done the work they are doing without the inspiration of his influence.

II.

There are other American exile poets, no less interesting than Pound, but I have been obliged to omit them, for the reason that, unlike him, they do not lend themselves to a misunderstanding of their position, but reveal more clearly than he has done the completely cosmopolitan European outlook. Without intending a bad pun, I might almost say that Pound's best work is actually provincial. Whatever sort of poetry he may attempt to write, the abiding result will always be found in the picturesque, flamboyant romanticism of his early phase. One cannot there-

fore omit him from a consideration of American poetry, for the reason that this tendency towards romanticism is just as clearly marked in the work of certain of the younger American poets as in his.

Along with this tendency, suppressed in Pound's case, there has arisen in America recently a clear reaction against the lyrical, and a growth of the impulse towards the dramatic. As this impulse is still in the formative stage, it is almost too early to predict anything concerning it. But in three other poets, two of whom, at least, have been influenced by Pound, it is possible to trace the early stages of this new development of American poetry.

Conrad Aiken might almost be termed a juvenile prodigy of poetry. Though barely past his thirtieth year, he is the author of five books of poetry, not to mention a volume of criticism. Not all in these books is worth reading. His first volume, *Earth Triumphant*, is interesting chiefly because of the strong influence of Masfield's realistic style. In his second (*Turns and Movies*) Aiken turned from Masfield to the sharper realism of Masters, without much success. It was not until his third that he found himself, and began to write the type of poetry which he has since so successfully developed.

Aiken is possibly a romantic, born out of time. The influence of the South upon his childhood probably gave him a bent towards the rich colouring and the sensuous verbal melody of Poe. The influences of his young manhood, spent at Harvard and in wandering about Europe, made him tend towards the realistic type of poetry. Since then he has attempted a fusion of both strains, not always with success. He has been reproached with his submission to so many influences from other poets. But this submission to influences is the mark of many a genuine artist, and Aiken doubtless felt the study of many other poets necessary before he could set himself to the task of exploring the complex richness of his own temperament.

A more just reproach to be made against him is that he has not yet found a subject capable of employing his fullest range of power.

Or, to speak better, he has found it merely in glimpses. *The Jig of Forslin*, the first book in which he began to be himself, is characteristic for this defect. Aiken takes the theme of an ordinary man, and seeks to draw the contrast between his actual life and his imaginary fantastic life of dreams. But long before we have finished the poem we forget who Forslin actually is. The range of fantastic experience through which he is made to pass is obviously beyond the scope of any ordinary individual, as Aiken himself admits in a prefatory note. But, he says, Forslin is not any particular man, but man in general. This vagueness and refusal to particularise detracts from the artistic value of the poem as a whole, though it enables us to appreciate certain portions of it, as, for instance, the scenes on Golgotha or the final concluding sections, beginning on page 119.

Already in this poem two tendencies are visible in Aiken. One is the tendency to balance the romantic and the realistic, which is somewhat overborne by his natural unconscious bent for the romantic; the second is the tendency to explore these romantic and realistic strains up to the point of their fusion in life, which makes his work essentially a poetry of dramatic contrast, or of counterpoint welded together only by his own rich sense of verbal melody. It is already apparent that Aiken requires a large canvas for his effects. In fact, he has developed Poe's celebrated theory about a long poem being only a succession of short ones to its logical conclusion. He splits the central theme up into innumerable facets, and sets these facets one against the other to shine by contrast. The result is that the central design is frequently lost (his poem called *The Charnel Rose*, which appeared in his last volume, but was written, I think, before *Forslin*, is an example of this).

As I have already said, it is certain that Aiken has the equipment of a poet, but not so certain that he has found the theme which will enable him to make fullest use of that endowment. Living in a country which has produced fewer individual great men than any other, and where the great body of the population are notoriously similar to each other, he is practically confined to the exploration

of the fantastic side of such ordinary lives as he sees about him. *Nocturne of Remembered Spring*, which followed *Forslin*, is an example of his inability to find a satisfying subject. A great deal of ability and genius has been wasted in this volume on working out the ordinary marital reactions of two quite ordinary people. The whole volume leaves one only with a vague sense of fatigue and weariness.

Senlin: a Biography, the most recently written poem of Aiken's which has appeared in book form, gives us more clearly than anything he has done the measure of his ability. *Senlin* is essentially a younger, more definite *Forslin*. The whole poem arranges itself, like a series of scenes out of drama, under the headings "His Dark Origins," "His Futile Preoccupations," and "His Cloudy Destiny." In many of these scenes a new desire to particularise, to make more definite, is clearly at work. Particularly striking is the scene where Aiken has set himself the task of recording the emotions of *Senlin* tying his necktie before a mirror in the morning, and relating these emotions to all the facts and surmises about this strange planet the world. In this scene he has succeeded more closely, perhaps, than anywhere else to rendering at once the pettiness and the grandeur of life.

III.

The tendency towards the dramatisation of psychological experience, already manifest in Aiken, grows more and more apparent as we approach the younger school. I have space but for two further examples.

Wallace Stevens stands in sharp contrast to the poets concerning whom I have already spoken, in so far as he has yet to publish his first volume. Whether this fact is due to a good-humoured contempt for the public taste or a feeling that he has not yet completely expressed himself, I cannot say. His poems, scattered largely through the files of *Poetry* and *Others*, are nevertheless highly significant of the tendency of the new movement.

Stevens is an ironist, but the same irony which is coldly stated in

Robinson, is half-hinted at in Frost, is insisted upon by Masters or Sandburg, or is implied by Aiken's counterpoint, changes in him to a note of agreeable banter. He is a dramatist without a theme—or perhaps lacking the ambition to find one. His one-act play, *Three Travellers Watch a Sunrise*, although it won an important prize, is a total failure. It barely develops a situation. Far more important is the strange psychological monologue, *Carlos Among the Candles*, which can also be found in the files of *Poetry*. It is obvious that in the figure of this "eccentric pedant of about forty" who lights candles in a darkened room in order to fill his life with magnificence, and then blows them all out again because he prefers the darkness outside, Stevens has symbolised much of his own attitude to life.

Stevens has certainly read very carefully a number of modern French poets. Whether he ever lived for a time in Paris I do not know. At all events, he carefully dresses his verses in the latest French mode. Only the vague sense of disquiet, pulsing underneath, proves him to be essentially American.

Phases, which appeared in *Poetry's* War Number, in November, 1914, gives his measure :—

“ There's a little square in Paris,
Waiting until we pass.
They sit idly there,
They sip the glass.

There's a cab-horse at the corner,
There's rain. The season grieves.
It was silver once,
And green with leaves.

There's a parrot at the window,
Will see us on parade,
Hear the loud drums roll—
And serenade.”

Concealed irony! The same note recurs in the celebrated *Peter Quince at the Clavier*, which is probably the finest poem, technically, which Stevens has written, and it dominates the

deliberately cryptic *Sunday Morning*, which is another *Portrait of a Lady* better and more memorable than T. S. Eliot's. Stevens is so quotable that one can scarcely resist a magnificent passage in the third section of this poem. But I must refer the reader to the appendix.

It is always the strange aspects of life which capture Stevens, and particularly the æsthetic aspect. He is merely a commentator upon them, detached and impersonal. He avoids going below the surface of these aspects, possibly because he feels that it is all only illusion, possibly because he is too sensitive to them. He is an artist without philosophy, and even as an artist his output must always be small, for the reason that so few themes are really fitted for that peculiar blending of the abstract and the objective that is his. His work recalls Mallarmé or Villiers de l'Isle Adam, and in some timeless, ageless drama like *Axél* or *Hérodias* he might be most at home. But there is no doubt whatever that, whether he ever finds a clear road for his genius to travel on or not, he is a poet.

IV.

Aiken and Stevens both tend towards a dramatisation of life-experience, but neither has written actual drama. A third poet, richer in some ways in experience than either, but far more severely limited in technique, has sought to cast his vision of life into rudimentary dramatic form. This poet is Alfred Kreymborg.

Kreymborg has had a varied career. Himself the child of obscure immigrant stock—the name is Danish, and Kreymborg is closely akin, temperamentally, to Hans Christian Andersen—he has lived all his life in the most complete poverty. Yet America has neither soured nor suppressed him. He has been editor, lecturer, poet, and filled various other rôles in life. And he has two books to his credit—one of which, *Mushrooms*, is almost entirely a joke; while the other, *Plays for Poem-Mimes*, looks like a joke, but takes on the appearance of something more serious when we understand what Kreymborg is trying to do.

He is trying to revive the theatre. Gifted with a sense of the ironic side of ordinary life, Kreymborg turns the lens of his observation upon men and women, and sees them as diminished, odd little puppets knocking each other about. So he writes his whimsical little plays of which the characteristic features are puckish humour and a limited but very sure control of cadence. It is a small achievement, but it is an achievement—for the reason that it foreshadows what may possibly prove to be a new field for American poetic talent.

Long ago Edwin Arlington Robinson began to pack life-dramas into lyric forms, despairing perhaps of being able to render them in any other way. Kreymborg, a representative of the very latest phase of the movement, is now tending in the same direction of drama, through the medium of puppet-plays. The dramatic impulse in America is not by any means dead—it has scarcely begun to unfold itself. Hitherto the genius of America's poets has been spent either upon the discovery of themselves and their surroundings or on the research into new forms of expression. The two opposing tendencies of poetic realism and of free-verse are now gradually approaching the point of fusion. This point is the starting-point of a new poetic drama. But before such a drama is possible in America the stage must be purged from all purely literary imitations of old models, and from the demands of spectacle. Kreymborg is performing one side of this task ; perhaps the cinematograph companies, by getting all the regular theatres into their hands, and thereby forcing drama to seek refuge in the hearts of enthusiastic amateurs, are unconsciously performing the other.

JOHN GOULD FLETCHER.

Extracts from Books mentioned in the Text

(I) EDWIN ARLINGTON ROBINSON

1. *The Children of the Night*. New York : Charles Scribner's Sons. First published 1897. Reprint, 1914. 2. *The Town Down the River*. New York : Charles Scribner's Sons, 1910. 3. *Captain Craig*. First edition, 1902. Revised edition, with additional poems, 1915. New York : The Macmillan Co. 4. *The Man Against the Sky*. New York : The Macmillan Co. 1916. 5. *Merlin*. The Macmillan Co. 1917.

THE MASTER (LINCOLN.)

A flying word from here and there
Had sown the name at which we sneered,
But soon the name was everywhere,
To be reviled and then revered :
A presence to be loved and feared,
We cannot hide it, or deny
That we, the gentlemen who jeered,
May be forgotten, by and by.

He came when days were perilous
And hearts of men were sore beguiled ;
And having made his note of us,
He pondered and was reconciled.
Was ever master yet so mild
As he, and so untamable ?
We doubted, even when he smiled
Not knowing what he knew so well.

He knew that undeceiving fate
Would shame us whom he served unsought ;
He knew that he must wince and wait—
The jest of those for whom he fought ;
He knew devoutly what he thought
Of us and of our ridicule ;
He knew that we must all be taught
Like little children in a school.

He gave a glamour to the task
That he encountered and saw through,
But little of us did he ask,
And little did we ever do.
And what appears if we review
The season when we railed and chaffed ?
It is the face of one who knew
That we were learning while we laughed.

The face that in our vision feels
Again the venom that we flung,
Transfigured to the world reveals
The vigilance to which we clung.
Shrewd, hallowed, harassed, and among
The mysteries that are untold,
The face we see was never young,
Nor could it ever have been old.

For he to whom we had applied
Our shopman's test of age and worth,
Was elemental when he died,
As he was ancient at his birth ;
The saddest among kings of earth,
Bowed with a galling crown, this man
Met rancour with a cryptic mirth,
Laconic—and Olympian.

The love, the grandeur, and the fame
Are bounded by the world alone ;
The calm, the smouldering, and the flame
Of awful patience, were his own :
With him they are forever flown
Past all our fond self-shadowings,
Wherewith we cumber the Unknown
As with inept, Icarian wings.

For we were not as other men :
'Twas ours to soar and his to see.
But we are coming down again,
And we shall come down pleasantly ;

Nor shall we longer disagree
On what it is to be sublime,
But flourish in our perigee
And have one Titan at a time.

(From "The Town Down the River.")

(II) ROBERT FROST

1. *A Boy's Will*. London: David Nutt, 1913. New York: Henry Holt and Co., 1915. 2. *North of Boston*. London: David Nutt, 1914. New York: Henry Holt and Co., 1914. 3. *Mountain Interval*. New York: Henry Holt and Co., 1916.

THE SOUND OF THE TREES.

I wonder about the trees.
Why do we wish to bear
Forever the noise of these
More than another noise
So close to our dwelling place?
We suffer them by the day
Till we lose all measure of pace,
And fixity in our joys,
And acquire a listening air.
They are that that talks of going
But never gets away;
And talks no less for knowing,
As it grows wiser and older,
That now it means to stay.
My feet tug at the floor
And my head sways to my shoulder
Sometimes when I watch trees sway,
From the window or the door.
I shall set forth somewhere,
I shall make the reckless choice
Some day when they are in voice
And tossing so as to scare
The white clouds over them on.
I shall have less to say,
But I shall be gone.

(From "Mountain Interval.")

(III) AMY LOWELL

1. *A Dome of Many Coloured Glass*. New York : The Macmillan Co., 1912.
2. *Sword Blades and Poppy Seed*. New York : The Macmillan Co., 1914.
3. *Men, Women and Ghosts*. New York : The Macmillan Co., 1916. 4. *Can Grande's Castle*. New York : The Macmillan Co., 1918. 5. *Pictures of the Floating World*. New York : The Macmillan Co., 1919. [An English edition of Miss Lowell's books is promised by Messrs. Blackwell, of Oxford.]

VENUS TRANSIENS.

Tell me
Was Venus more beautiful
Than you are,
When she topped
The crinkled waves,
Drifting shoreward
On her plaited shell ?
Was Botticelli's vision
Fairer than mine ;
And were the painted rosebuds
He tossed his lady,
Of better worth
Than the words I blow about you
To cover your too great loveliness
As with a gauze
Of misted silver ?
For me,
You stand poised
In the blue and buoyant air,
Cinctured by bright winds,
Treading the sunlight.
And the waves which precede you
Ripple and stir
The sands at your feet.

(From " Pictures of the Floating World ")

(IV) EDGAR LEE MASTERS

1. *Spoon River Anthology*. The Macmillan Co., 1915. The same, with additional poems, 1916. 2. *Songs and Satires*. The Macmillan Co., 1916. 3. *The Great Valley*. The Macmillan Co., 1916. 4. *Towards the Gulf*. The Macmillan Co., 1918. 5. *Starved Rock*. The Macmillan Co., 1920. [Masters's books are published by Werner Laurie in England.]

COONEY POTTER.

I inherited forty acres from my father ;
And by working my wife, my two sons and my daughters
From dawn to dusk, I acquired
A thousand acres. But not content,
Wishing to own two thousand acres,
I hustled through the years with axe and plow,
Toiling, denying myself, my wife, my sons, my daughters.
Squire Higbee wrongs me to say
That I died from smoking Red Eagle cigars.
Eating hot pie and gulping coffee
During the scorching hours of harvest time
Brought me here ere I had reached my sixtieth year.
(From "Spoon River Anthology.")

FIDDLER JONES.

The earth keeps some vibration going
There in your heart, and that is you.
And if the people find you can fiddle
Why, fiddle you must, for all your life.
What do you see, a harvest of clover ?
Or a meadow to walk through to the river ?
The wind's in the corn ; you rub your hands
For beeves hereafter ready for market ;
Or else you hear the rustle of skirts
Like the girls when dancing at Little Grove.
To Cooney Potter a pillar of dust
Or whirling leaves meant ruinous drouth ;
They looked to me like Red-Head Sammy
Stepping it off to "Toor-a-Loor."
How could I till my forty acres
Not to speak of getting more,
With a medley of horns, bassoons and piccolos

Stirred in my brain by crows and robins
And the creak of a windmill—only these ?
And I never started to plow in my life
That someone did not stop in the road
And take me off to a dance or a picnic.
I ended up with forty acres ;
I ended up with a broken fiddle—
And a broken laugh, and a thousand memories,
And not a single regret.

(From " Spoon River Anthology.")

(V) CARL SANDBURG

1. *Chicago Poems*. Henry Holt, 1916. 2. *Cornhuskers*. Henry Holt, 1918.

THE ANSWER.

You have spoken the answer.
A child searches far sometimes
Into the red dust
On a dark rose-leaf.
And so you have gone far,
For the answer is :
Silence.

In the republic
Of the winking stars,
And spent cataclysms,
Sure we are it is off there, the answer is hidden and folded over,
Sleeping in the sun, careless whether it is Sunday or any other day of the
week.

Have we not seen
Purple of the pansy
Out of the mulch
And mould
Crawl
Into a dusk of velvet,
Blur of yellow ?
Almost we thought from nowhere, but it was the silence,
The future
Working.

(From " Chicago Poems.")

(VI) VACHEL LINDSAY

1. *General William Booth Enters into Heaven*. Mitchell Kennerley 1913. Reprint, The Macmillan Co., 1916. [Published in London by Chatto and Windus, with an introduction by Robert Nichols, 1919.] 2. *A Handy Guide for Beggars*. Written 1913. Published, The Macmillan Co., 1916. Contains some poems. 3. *Adventures While Preaching the Gospel of Beauty*. Mitchell Kennerley, 1914. The Macmillan Co., 1916. Contains poems. 4. *The Congo and Other Poems*. The Macmillan Co., 1914. 5. *The Chinese Nightingale and Other Poems*. The Macmillan Co., 1917. 6. *The Golden Whales of California*. The Macmillan Co., 1920.

THE BRONCHO THAT WOULD NOT BE BROKEN.

A little colt-broncho, loaned to the farm
To be broken in time without fury or harm,
Yet black crows flew past you, shouting alarm,
Calling "Beware," with lugubrious singing . . .
The butterflies there in the bush were romancing,
The smell of the grass caught your soul in a trance,
So, why be a-fearing the spurs and the traces,
O broncho that would not be broken of dancing ?

You were born with the pride of the lords great and olden
Who danced, through the ages, in corridors golden;
In all the wide farm-place the person most human,
You spoke out so plainly with squealing and capering,
With whinnying, snorting, contorting, and prancing,
As you dodged your pursuers, looking askance,
With Greek-footed figures and Parthenon paces,
O broncho that would not be broken of dancing.

The grasshoppers cheered. "Keep whirling," they said.
The insolent sparrows called from the shed,
"If men will not laugh, make them wish they were dead."
But arch were your thoughts, all malice displacing,
Though the horse-killers came, with snake-whips advancing.
You bantered and cantered away your last chance,
And they scourged you, with Hell in their speech and their faces,
O broncho that would not be broken of dancing.

"Nobody cares for you," rattled the crows,
As you dragged the whole stable next day down the rows.

The three mules held back, yet you danced on your toes,
You pulled like a racer and kept the mules chasing.
You tangled the harness with bright eyes side-glancing.
While the drunk driver bled you—a pole for a lance—
And the giant mules bit at you—keeping their places,
O broncho that would not be broken of dancing.

In that last afternoon your boyish heart broke.
The hot wind came down like a sledge-hammer stroke,
The blood-sucking flies to a rare feast awoke,
And they searched out your wounds, your death-warrant tracing.
And the merciful men, their religion enhancing,
Stopped the red reaper to give you a chance.
Then you died on the prairie, and scorned all disgraces,
O broncho that would not be broken of dancing.

(From "The Chinese Nightingale.")

(VII) CONRAD AIKEN

1. *Earth Triumphant*. Macmillan, 1913. 2. *Turns and Movies*. Houghton, Mifflin and Co., and Constables, 1915. 3. *The Jig of Forslin*. Four Seas Co., 1916. 4. *Nocturne of Remembered Spring*. Four Seas Co., 1917. 5. *The Charnel Rose*. Four Seas Co., 1918.

MORNING SONG OF SENLIN.

It is morning, Senlin says, and in the morning
When the light drips through the shutters like the dew.
I arise, I face the sunrise,
And do the things my fathers learned to do.
Stars in the purple dusk above the rooftops
Pale in a saffron mist and seem to die,
And I myself on a swiftly tilting planet
Stand before a glass and tie my tie.

Vine-leaves tap my window,
Dewdrops sing to the garden stones ;
The robin chirps in the chinaberry tree,
Repeating three clear tones.

It is morning. I stand before a window,
And tie my tie once more :

While waves far off in a pale rose twilight
Crash on a white sand shore.

I stand by a mirror and comb my hair :
How small and white my face !
The green earth tilts through a sea of air,
And bathes in a flame of space.
There are houses hanging above the stars,
And stars hang under the sea ;
And a sun far off in a shell of silence
Dapples my walls for me. . . .

It is morning, Senlin says, and in the morning
Shall I not pause in the light to remember God ?
Upright and firm I stand on a star unstable,
He is immense and lovely as a cloud.
I will dedicate this moment before the mirror
To him alone, for him I will comb my hair ;
Accept these humble offerings cloud of silence !
I will think of you as I descend the stair.

Vine-leaves tap my window,
The snail-track shines on the stones,
The robin chirps in the chinaberry tree,
Repeating two clear tones.

It is morning. I awake from a bed of silence,
Shining I rise from the starless waters of sleep.
The walls are about me still as in the evening.
I am the same, and the same name I keep.
The earth revolves with me, yet makes no motion,
The stars pale silently in a coral sky,
In a whistling void I stand before my mirror
Unconcerned, and tie my tie.

There are horses neighing on far-off hills,
Tossing their long white manes,
And mountains flash in the rose-white dusk,
Their shoulders black with rains. . . .
It is morning. I stand by the mirror
And surprise my soul once more ;
The blue air rushes above my ceiling,
There are suns beneath my floor. . . .

. . . It is morning, Senlin says, I ascend from darkness
And depart on the winds of space, I know not where,
My watch is wound, a key is in my pocket,
And the sky is darkened as I descend the stair.
There are shadows across the windows, clouds in heaven,
And a God among the stars ; and I will go
Thinking of him as I might think of daybreak,
And humming a tune I know. . . .

Vine-leaves tap at the window,
Dewdrops sing to the garden stones,
A robin chirps in the chinaberry tree
Repeating three clear tones.

(From "The Charnel Rose and Other Poems.")

(VIII) WALLACE STEVENS

In *The New Poetry*, edited by Harriet Monroe. The Macmillan Co., 1916.
And in *Others*—an Anthology. 1st and 2nd series. New York : Knopf.

SUNDAY MORNING.

I.

Complacencies of the peignoir, and late
Coffee and oranges in a sunny chair,
And the green freedom of a cockatoo
Upon a rug, mingle to dissipate
The holy hush of ancient sacrifice.
She dreams a little, and she feels the dark
Encroachment of that old catastrophe,
As a calm darkness among water-lights.
The pungent oranges and bright, green wings
Seem things in a procession of the dead,
Winding across wide water, without sound.
The day is like wide water, without sound,
Stilled for the passing of her dreaming feet
Over the seas, to silent Palestine,
Dominion of the blood and sepulchre.

II.

She hears, upon that water without sound,
A voice that cries, " The tomb in Palestine
Is not the porch of spirits lingering ;
It is the grave of Jesus, where he lay."
We live in an old chaos of the sun,
Or old dependency of day and night,
Or island solitude, unsponsored, free,
Of that wide water, inescapable.
Deer walk upon our mountains, and the quail
Whistle about us their spontaneous cries ;
Sweet berries ripen in the wilderness ;
And, in the isolation of the sky
At evening, casual flocks of pigeons make
Ambiguous undulations as they sink
Downwards to darkness on extended wings.

III.

She says, " I am content when wakened birds
Before they fly, test the reality
Of misty fields, by their sweet questionings ;
But when the birds are gone, and the warm fields
Return no more, where then is Paradise ? "
There is not any haunt of prophecy,
Nor any old chimæra of the grave,
Neither the golden underground, nor isle
Melodious, where the spirits gat them home,
Nor visionary South, nor cloudy palm
Remote on heaven's hill, that has endured
As April's green endures ; or will endure
Like her remembrance of awakened birds,
Or her desire for June and evening, tipped
By the consummation of the swallow's wings.

(One stanza omitted.)

V.

Supple and turbulent, a ring of men
Shall chant in orgy on a summer morn
Their boisterous devotion to the sun—
Not as a god, but as a god might be,
Naked among them, like a savage source.
Their chant shall be a chant of paradise,
Out of their blood, returning to the sky ;
And in their chant shall enter, voice by voice,
The windy lake wherein their lord delights
The trees, like seraphim, and echoing hills,
That choir among themselves long afterward
They shall know well the heavenly fellowship
Of men that perish and of summer morn—
And whence they came and whither they shall go,
The dew upon their feet shall manifest.
(From " The New Poetry : an Anthology.")

(IX) ALFRED KREYMBORG

1. *Mushrooms*. The Others Press, 1915. 2. *Plays for Poem-Mimes*. The Others Press, 1919.

MAN TELLS.

Do you love that woman, sir ?
Yes, that which I make of her.
Isn't she most beautiful ?
Yes, because I think her so.
Hasn't she the best of hearts ?
Yes, because I want it so.
Then there might be more like her ?
Yes, the one you love.

WOMAN TELLS.

I know that you do, but—
When last did you tell me ?
I know that you gave, but—
What roses and roses !
I know that you will, but—
Such kisses to go !
I know, yes, I know, but—
Begin !

EARTH WISDOM.

Said the earth :—
I love you, flower.
Go up and see the sun.
And feel the rain—it's soft.
Winds will play with you,
Merry winds.
*—But see that great blue,
I like that round blue,
I want that high blue !*

Said the earth :—
I love you, flower.
It is late,
Come back to me.
*—I don't want to :
I won't.
I want the moon,
I want— !*

You've been playing too long, flower.
That isn't good for you.
Nor fair to the morrow.
Come,
Said the earth.

(From " Others : an Anthology.")

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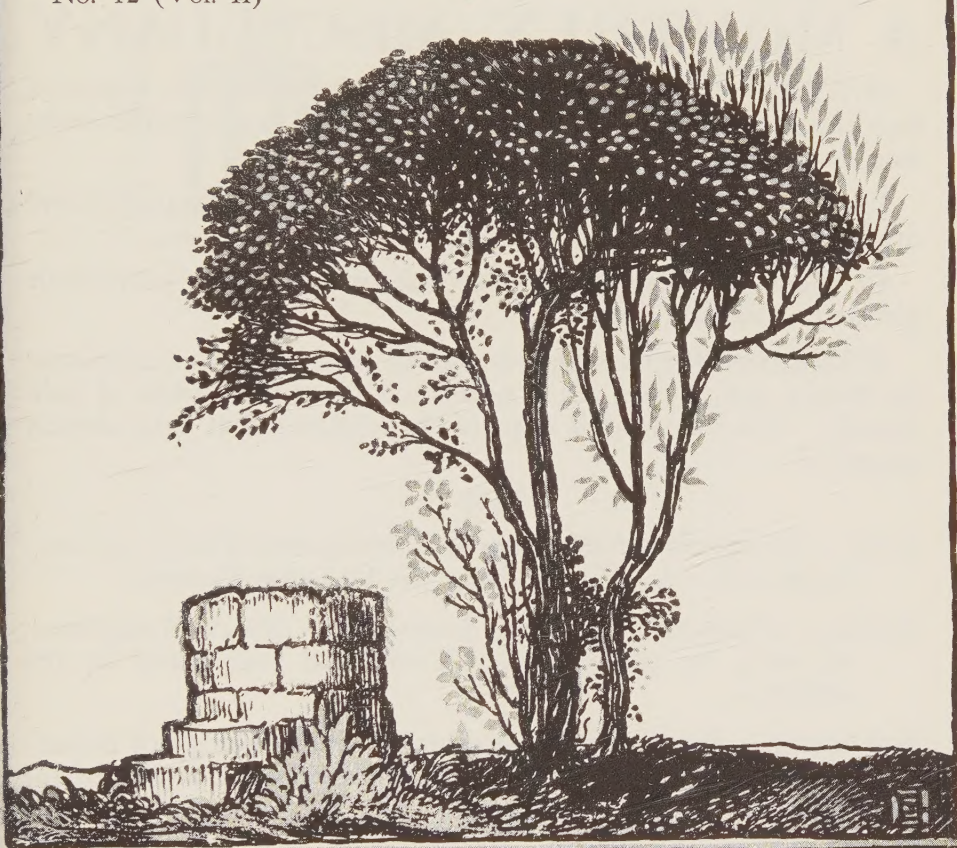


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(A MONTHLY MISCELLANY)

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